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### **[Review of] A Contrastive View of Discourse Markers. Discourse Markers of Saying in English and French**

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## Book Review



Lansari, Laure. (2020). *A Contrastive View of Discourse Markers. Discourse Markers of Saying in English and French*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan. 230 pages, ISBN 978-3-030-24896-3.

This book offers a cross-linguistic, multi-dimensional description of a set of four discourse markers (henceforth DMs) involving a *verbum dicendi*, namely *on va dire* and *j'allais dire* in French and *shall we say* and *I was going to say* in English. By combining two major linguistic approaches, the author provides a comprehensive and fine-grained analysis of these expressions on the basis of samples extracted from web corpora, to show the differences and similarities between languages and among the individual discourse markers. This book is strikingly to the point and achieves its goals (i.e. “to enrich our understanding of the four DMs compared here” and “to set up an original framework” to analyse DMs, p. vi) in an efficient, reader-friendly yet subtle way.

It is certainly in the latter of these two goals that the main contribution of this book lies: confronting the pragmatic approach to DMs, as widely adopted in English linguistics, with the theoretical framework of *énonciation*, influential in (but so far restricted to) French linguistics, is both original and appropriate. This choice leads to an interesting mix of references to English(-speaking) and French scholars, which broadens the reader's horizons. In particular, the Theory of Enunciative and Predicative Operations, recently introduced beyond France by Ranger (2018), is worthy of further attention, as it brings to the fore the notion that language is inherently unstable and needs to be constantly regulated between speakers. Lansari not only critically discusses the two frameworks, but also goes a methodological step further by applying a systematic annotation grid to corpus data, whereas many semantic-pragmatic analyses of DMs, from either English or French traditions, remain largely qualitative in nature. That being said, the author appears to have overlooked recent corpus-based studies that also use annotation schemes covering some (or all) of the same criteria, languages and data types, such as Degand and van Bergen

(2018) for DMs in computer-mediated communication, Pons Bordería (2018) on the grammaticalisation, functions and positions of DMs, Bolly et al. (2017) for the multi-dimension annotation of DMs in spoken French or Crible's (2018) comprehensive portrait of DMs in spoken English and French. As a result, Lansari's claim that "most studies tend to concentrate on one or two particular linguistic dimensions only, which explains why integrative models are rare" (p. 81, and again on p. 87) is clearly not true.

The structure of the book is extremely reader-friendly, with chapters mirroring one another, numerous examples and helpful interim summaries. In Chapter 1, the author gives a historical and epistemological presentation of the pragmatic and enunciative traditions in English and French linguistics, respectively, which sets the theoretical background for the study. Chapter 2 is somewhat more surprising as it includes theoretical and methodological considerations and presents the first quantitative results all at once. Chapter 3 systematically reports on all the annotated parameters, which are then developed more qualitatively in Chapters 4 and 5. These two central chapters follow the same structure: semantic description of the two pairs of DMs (*on va dire* and *shall we say* in Chapter 4, *j'allais dire* and *I was going to say* in Chapter 5) in terms of enunciative operations; inclusion of pragmatic, syntactic and collocational features to show more subtle differences; discussion of the pragmaticalisation paths (i.e. the stages of evolution from a grammatical item to a pragmatic item) and the 'discursive profile' of the DMs. Lastly, Chapter 6 summarises the results, showing the link between speaker commitment, the DMs of *saying* and reformulation.

What we learn from the analysis of the four DMs is that they share a meta-linguistic comment function and they all indicate that speaker commitment is not complete, for example because other formulation possibilities are available. The author convincingly shows that the morphosyntactic features (singular vs. plural pronoun in particular) of the DMs are reflected in the different regulatory operations performed by the two pairs: either the DM stabilises one linguistic choice through a false intersubjective consensus (*on va dire, shall we say*) or it presents two competing options and thus fails to stabilise the discourse (*j'allais dire, I was going to say*). Further differences in terms of scope, sentence- and turn-position, collocation patterns and specific pragmatic functions reveal that "all four DMs have undergone pragmaticalisation, developing new discourse functions that correlate with new syntactic features" (p. 217), although the specific path and degree of pragmaticalisation is somewhat DM-specific. What is particularly innovative in the analysis is the three-fold approach that, as far as I am aware, goes beyond any previous account of DMs: i) the author strives to identify specific pragmatic functions

for each DM (i.e. reformulation, topic shifting, affiliation), which is consistent with the English pragmatics tradition, and ii) traces them back to the original, grammatical meaning of the expression, *à la* Culioli (1990) and Ranger (2018), all the while iii) describing their syntactic behaviour through operational annotated parameters.

Lansari's scientific curiosity thus leaves no stone unturned. The analysis displays a level of granularity that can only be achieved with case studies of a limited number of expressions, which raises questions about the relevance of this approach for larger groups of expressions or entire categories, but which seems more than adequate for the purpose of this book. This comes at a price: the pragmatic analyses sometimes appear quite lengthy and abstract, at the expense of the theoretical discussion, which is at times frustratingly superficial, especially in the first two chapters. For instance, on page 126, the reader casually learns in passing that the texts might not all have been produced by native speakers (as this is hard to control in web corpora), which is quite problematic when dealing with semantic-pragmatic analyses. Similarly, the issue of text genre seems to be insufficiently addressed, since computer-mediated communication is far from homogeneous and varies according to formality, preparedness, the presence of an audience and language innovation, which are intermediate between speech and writing and should have deserved more than a brief mention in the book's conclusion. At the very least, specifying the type of text from which each example had been extracted would have been a valuable addition to the analysis, as one would expect more pragmaticalised uses to typically occur on interactive platforms than on news websites, for example.

Considering the very low frequency with which the DMs under scrutiny are used in language, the empirical contribution of the book is rather limited, but its theoretical and methodological impact is potentially far-reaching. In particular, the analysis in terms of discourse (in)stability, and within that the specific function of affiliation, resonates with the concept of conversational alignment, a notion which is actively investigated in linguistics and psychology (e.g. Pickering and Garrod, 2021). Such framing in terms of stance and alignment shows once more the relevance of DMs in a wide array of research topics and will surely inspire future studies.

Overall, the book is well-written, with very few typographical errors – note, however, the ironical omission of 'say' in some instances of 'I was going to say'. It is also relatively short, especially when the frequent repetitions, summaries and cross-section references are considered, which, on the other hand, make it an easy read. The introduction and conclusion may seem a little abrupt and could perhaps have framed the study in a more general context,

to accommodate a wider readership. Still, the reader's expectations are met in terms of the scope of this honest piece of research that acknowledges its own limits, does not promise *monts et merveilles* ('the moon and stars') yet illustrates the benefits of studies that go beyond a single theoretical or methodological approach.

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